

A top-down view of a desk setup. In the upper right, a portion of a silver laptop is visible, showing the keyboard and trackpad. To its left, a black pen lies vertically on a light brown, textured notebook. Below the pen, a dark brown folder or another notebook is partially visible. In the lower right, a white ceramic cup filled with dark coffee sits on a square, woven wicker coaster. The desk surface is a mix of light wood and textured fabric.

# Optional Practical Training (OPT) Guide



Office of International Student Services  
ISS@limcollege.edu  
545 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York, NY

## What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

OPT is a benefit of your F-1 status. OPT is a temporary employment authorization that is directly related to your major field of study. There are two types of OPT: Pre-completion OPT and Post-completion OPT. Pre-completion OPT occurs *during an* academic program. Post-completion OPT occurs after you complete your degree program requirements. This guide is for LIM College students who are interested in applying for post-completion OPT. Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization.

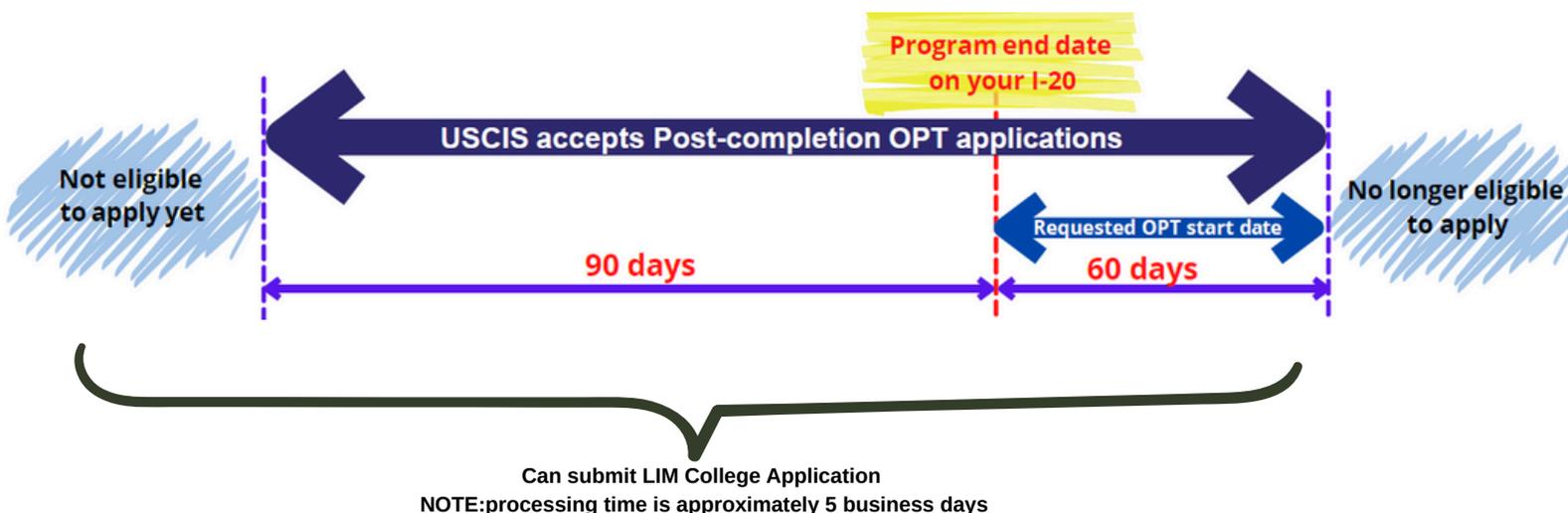
## What makes me eligible for OPT?

1. You must be physically present in the U.S. to apply for OPT
2. You must be in active F-1 status
3. You must have been enrolled, in active F-1 status, for at least one academic year (2 semesters, in a row; example: Fall, Spring or Spring, Fall)
4. You must not have engaged in 12 months or more of full time CPT at the same degree level; Full-time CPT= more than 20 hours per week)
5. You must be in good academic standing
6. You do **not need** a job offer to apply for OPT

## When can I apply for OPT?

The earliest that you can apply for post-completion OPT is **90 days before** the official end date of the semester in which you are graduating. The latest that you can apply for OPT is within the 60 days after the official end date of the semester in which you are graduating (note: this should be the **program end date on your I-20**; if the program end date on your I-20 is incorrect-contact ISS@limcollege.edu immediately). **We recommend that you apply as early as possible.** The government agency, "USCIS" (United States Citizenship & Immigration Services) will not accept applications received 60 days or more beyond the program end date on your I-20. See timeline example below:

### TIMELINE:



# OPT Application Process

## **STEP 1: Begin the OPT application process by completing the LIM College “OPT Application/Request Form”**

- a. The first step in gaining OPT approval is to complete the **LIM College OPT Application/request form**
- b. In order to officially apply to the government, **you first need an I-20 with an “OPT Recommendation” from an LIM College Designated School Official (DSO)**
- c. Once you have submitted the LIM College OPT Application/Request Form, the International Student Services Department (ISS) will review your application, and if all information is accurate, will provide you with an **“OPT Recommended I-20”**
- d. You will need to select a “START DATE” on this application; see START DATE info in FAQ section of this packet.

**Graduate Students:** [CLICK HERE FOR OPT APPLICATION](#)

**Undergraduate Students:** [CLICK HERE FOR OPT APPLICATION](#)

## **STEP 2: Review, Print and Sign your new “OPT Recommended I-20”**

- a. Once your LIM College application has been processed, the ISS department will email you your “OPT Recommended I-20”, to your LIM College email. Note: processing time is between 5-7 business days.
- b. Review your new I-20, and verify that your information is correct; including your name, start date, address, etc. Email [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu) with any questions or requests for changes.
- c. If all information is correct and accurate, print, and sign your “OPT Recommended I-20” under the “Student Attestation” section. You will need this signed copy, for your government application.



**IMPORTANT:** Your “OPT Recommended I-20 is issued to you on a specific date (this date is on the I-20 under “School Attestation”, and will also be highlighted in the email that we send to you). You must submit your application to the government within 30 days of this date. Applications submitted to the government after the 30-day window has passed, will be automatically denied.



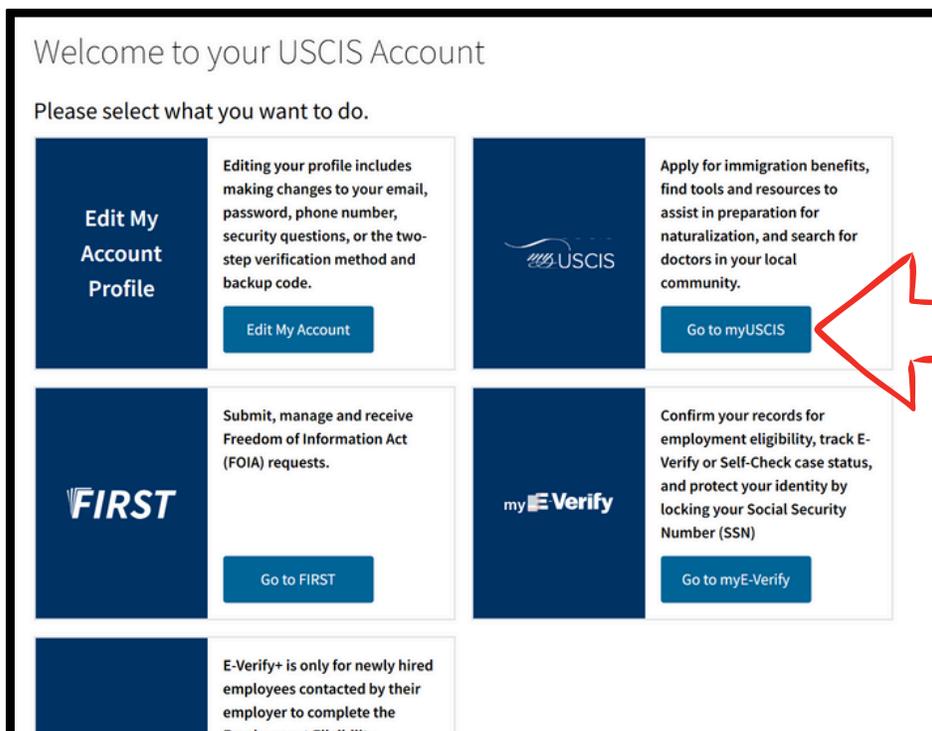
**Students without an OPT Recommended I-20 should not apply to USCIS. You must first complete the LIM College application (noted above) to get the “OPT Recommended I-20”**

### STEP 3: Collect and prepare documents for your USCIS (government) OPT application

- a. You will need the following documents, ready to submit with your application to the government:
  - i. **Digital 2"X 2" passport style photo** of you that meets USCIS specifications. These specifications can be found [here](#). The photo must have been taken within 30 days.
  - ii. **Scan of your most recent Form I-94**. You can obtain your most recent I-94 form [here](#). Select "Get Most Recent I-94" on this page. Your I-94 *should* show your most recent admission into the U.S. as "F-1 D/S".
  - iii. **Scan of your passport biographic page** (the page with your photo). Your passport must be valid at least 6 months into the future. If your passport is expired, or will expire within 6 months, you must renew your passport at your countries embassy or consulate in the U.S. There are many locations in/around New York City.
  - iv. **Scan of any previous I-20's with CPT or previous OPT authorizations issued by LIM College or other schools**. If you are missing an I-20(s), upload a letter of explanation with your application. The ISS Office can provide you with a template, if needed.
  - v. **Scan of all 3 pages of your new "OPT Recommended I-20"**.
  - vi. **Scan of any previous Employment Authorization Document Cards (EAD Card); if application only**
  - vii. **Prepare for USCIS required fees**; current online filing fee as of Oct 2025 for OPT: \$470 (standard); premium processing (faster processing) is at an additional cost

### STEP 4: Create your USCIS online account

- a. Create your USCIS online account [here](#). (Follow all initial set-up instructions).  
**DO NOT USE YOUR LIM COLLEGE EMAIL ADDRESS.**
- a. Follow these steps:



Select:  
"Go to MyUSCIS"

**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**

### Account Type

USCIS only offers certain benefit types for online filing. Please refer to the [USCIS File Online webpage](#) for further guidance.

H-1B registrations and Form I-129 H-1B petitions can only be filed using the attorney or accredited representative account or a company account.

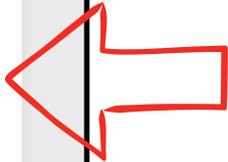
Select an account type:

I am an individual applicant, petitioner, or requestor.

- I am an individual and want to file an application, petition, or request for myself.

I am a Legal Representative.

I am a company...



**Select** the account type that applies to you. Most often, if you are filing your application on your own (without legal assistance), you will select “I am an individual applicant, petitioner or requestor”

**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**

My Account | Resources | Sign Out

## Welcome To Your USCIS Account

### Select What You Want To Do

**Add a case to your account**  
Enter your online access code (OAC) to add and manage a case to your account

**File a form online**  
Start a new form, upload evidence, and pay and submit online

**Enter a representative passcode**  
Review and sign forms prepared for you by your attorney or representative

**Change your address**  
Update your address with USCIS

**Reschedule biometrics**  
Search for your existing biometrics



**Select:** “File a Form Online”

## File a Form

Select the form you want to file online. For some forms you will have the option to either fill out your form online or upload a completed form. Once you start, we will automatically save your information for 30 days, or from the last time you worked on the form.

**Fee waiver:** Fee waivers can be requested online only when submitting certain benefit requests using the PDF filing option. If your desired benefit request is not eligible for PDF filing, you must file a paper version of both the Form I-912, Request for Fee Waiver and the form for the specific benefit you are requesting. You can review the fee waiver guidance at [www.uscis.gov/feewaiver](http://www.uscis.gov/feewaiver).

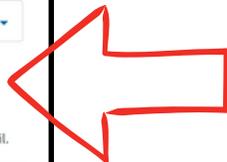
Select the form you want to file online.

I-765, Application for Employment Authorization

What is your eligibility category?

If your eligibility category is not listed in the drop down menu, you can submit a [paper form](#) by mail.

(c)(3)(B) Student Post-Completion OPT



**Select:**

- 1.) I-765 Application for Employment Authorization
- 2.) (c)(3)(B) Student Post-Completion OPT

What is your eligibility category? \*

**⚠** You can file your request online only for certain eligibility categories

If your eligibility category does not appear on the drop-down list, you must file a paper [Form I-765](#). If you submit online and are not eligible for one of the listed categories, your application may be denied.

(c)(3)(B) Student Post-Completion OPT

**Select:**  
(c)(3)(B) Student Post-Completion OPT

Would you like to request Premium Processing Service?

Premium Processing Service guarantees that USCIS will take one of several possible actions (issue an approval notice, a denial notice, a notice of intent to deny, or a request for evidence or open an investigation for fraud or misrepresentation) on your Form I-765 within 30 days.

If you request premium processing, you will be asked to complete the Form I-907 after you sign your Form I-765. You will then be able to pay for and submit both forms at the same time.

Yes  
 No

**Standard processing time** has historically been between 3-5 months.

**Premium Processing**, which costs an additional fee, will get you a decision within 30 days.

**Select Yes/No depending on if you want to pay this fee.**



**CONTINUE THROUGH THE REMAINDER OF THE QUESTIONS/PROMPTS IN THE USCIS APPLICATION.**

It is the student's responsibility to ensure the online application is completed fully, accurately, and includes all required document uploads before submitting their application.



**Questions? Contact [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu)**



## After You Submit Your Application

- 1.) USCIS processing may take up to 3-5 months to adjudicate OPT applications
- 2.) Monitor your application status via your USCIS account [HERE](#).
- 3.) Sign up for USPS informed delivery to track the delivery of your documents [HERE](#).
- 4.) You should expect to receive the following:
  - I-797 Receipt Notice with your case number (in your USCIS online account)
  - I-797 Approval Notice (in your USCIS online account)
  - EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card- send by physical mail
  - You may receive a “RFE” (Request for Evidence); contact [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu) for assistance

## Important

1.) After you have completed your program/degree, you are entitled to a 60-day grace period. If you have applied for OPT within the regulatory deadlines, the grace period does not apply. You can stay in the U.S. for as long as it takes USCIS to review your application; however, **you cannot begin working until you have been approved for OPT and received your EAD card and are within the approved start/end dates.**

2.) **Travel before OPT approval is not recommended.** If there is an emergency that requires you to travel before you receive a decision on your OPT application, please contact [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu) for guidance.

3.) There are rules and responsibilities for those in F-1 status, who have either a pending OPT application or an approved OPT application. Check your copy of the LIM College OPT Request form (in your LIM email), for section 2 “Acknowledgement of Responsibilities”.

# After your OPT Application is Approved

- 1.) You will receive an approval notice (I-797)
- 2.) You will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD Card) in the physical mail
  - Your EAD card will have a “start date” and an “end date”.
  - You can only work within these dates. Working outside of these dates is a violation of status.
- 3.) **ON DAY 1 of your approved start date (on your EAD CARD and on approval notice)**
  - You will receive an email with instructions to create a SEVP portal account.
  - You can use this portal to report employer information, make changes to your address and/or telephone number
  - Log into the SEVP portal [HERE](#) (after initial set-up)

## Reporting OPT Employment

There are **TWO ways that you can report OPT employment.**

All employment or changes to employment must be reported within 10 days.

- **Option 1 to report employment:** Log into your SEVP Portal [HERE](#) and report your employment yourself, through the system.
- **Option 2 to report employment:** Complete the LIM College ISS Reporting Form. Email [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu) to get this form. Once you complete the form, email it to [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu). We will then report your employment in the system, for you.

If at any point, you need an updated I-20, showing new/changed employment information; email [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu) to request an updated I-20.



# Types of Acceptable OPT Employment

**ALL types of employment listed below must be directly related to your degree program/studies AND be at least 20 hours or more per week.**

**Acceptable types of employment per SEVP OPT Policy Guidance [7.2.1]:**

- **Regular paid employment:** Job/position that is paid.
- **Unpaid employment:** A student may work as a volunteer or unpaid intern (must not violate any labor laws).
- **Multiple employers:** A student may work for more than one employer, at the same time or one-at-a-time. All employment must be related to a student's degree program/studies.
- **Short-Term multiple employers:** A student, such as a musician or performing artist, may work for multiple short-term employers (gigs). The student should maintain a list of all gigs, the dates and duration.
- **Employment through an Agency or Consulting Firm:** Students must be able to provide evidence that they worked an average of at least 20 hours per week while employed by the agency.
- **Self-employed Business Owner:** A student on OPT may start a business and be self-employed. The student must be able to prove that they has the proper business licenses and is actively engaged in a business related to the student's degree program/studies.
- **Work for Hire:** This is also commonly referred to as "1099 employment", where an individual performs a service based on a contractual relationship rather than an employment relationship. If requested, the student must be prepared to provide evidence showing the duration of the contract period and the name/address of the contracting company.

**For any of the above employment types; students (for their own records) should maintain information regarding job descriptions, contracts (if applicable), hours worked, offer letters, etc. All work must be directly related to your degree program/studies; it is ultimately the student's responsibility to justify their employment and how it relates to their studies.**

## 90-Day Unemployment Rule

**Students approved for OPT are "given" a total of 90 days of unemployment.**

- Unemployment days accumulate when/if employment is not reported, starting on DAY 1 of your approved start date.
- Example: Approved OPT Start Date= Sept 1. Student does not begin working/reporting employment until Sept 26. Student was unemployed from Sept 1-Sept 25; and therefore has accumulated 25 unemployment days (of the 90 given).
- Unemployment days can be spread out over your approved OPT start/end dates.
- If you accrue more than 90 days of unemployment, you will be considered out-of-status and your F-1 record may be automatically terminated by the government. Contact [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu)



## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1.) How do I choose a “START DATE” (required for the LIM College application)?

Choosing an OPT start date is one of the most challenging parts of the application process. There is no right/wrong start date and only the student can ultimately pick their date. Your selected start date **must be within the 60 day grace period, after your program end date:**



#### **Consider:**

- When do I want to begin working?
- Do I have a job offer/position lined up? When do they want me to start?
- Do I want a “buffer” period after my program end date, so I have time to look for a job/position?

**Important:** Once your USCIS application has been submitted, you **cannot adjust your start date**. OPT is generally approved by the government for 12 months from your selected start date.

- **Example:**
- **Requested Start Date:** 9/2/2026
- **End Date:** 9/1/2027 (12 months, minus 1 day, from requested start date)

### 2.) Do I need to have a job in line, to apply for OPT? Does the job need to be approved through Handshake or by the ISS Office?

**No!** You do not need to have a job or position lined up in order to apply for or be approved for OPT.

**No!** You do not need to submit job/position information into Handshake or to the International Student Services Office.

Once you have been approved for OPT, have received your EAD card, and are within your start/end dates: your responsibility is to report your employment and to only participate in employment that is directly related to your degree/studies for which your OPT has been approved.

### **3.) I have a job offer but my EAD card has not arrived yet. Can I begin work?**

**No!** Working before your OPT has been authorized by USCIS, and you have received your physical EAD card constitutes illegal employment that may jeopardize your legal status in the U.S.

### **4.) Do I need to keep proof of my employment on OPT?**

**YES!** You are strongly encouraged to keep documented proof of each employment that you engage in while on OPT. Relevant information may include position title, responsibilities, duration of position, number of hours worked per week, and supervisor contact information. You may be asked, down the road-by the government, to supply this information, so it is in your best interest to keep as much information on all OPT positions as possible.

### **5.) Can I travel while my OPT application is pending? Can I travel after my OPT has been approved?**

**Travel while OPT application is pending:** LIM recommends that students reconsider travel while you have a pending OPT application (have not received a decision yet). Traveling during this time should be undertaken at the student's own risk. If you must travel outside the U.S. while your OPT application is pending, you must have: a valid passport (valid at least 6 months into the future), a valid F-1 visa, an I-20 with pending OPT notation and a travel signature, the I-797 receipt notice (showing that you have applied for OPT).

**Travel after OPT has been approved:** Students who have an approved OPT application may only re-enter the U.S. to resume employment. This means that if you leave the U.S., with approved OPT, you should ideally have a job/position in place before traveling. If you travel after OPT approval, you must have: a valid passport (valid at least 6 months into the future), a valid F-1 visa, an I-20 with approved OPT notation, updated/current employer information and a travel signature. You should also bring proof of a job or job offer, to show that you are returning to resume/begin employment.

### **6.) Does vacation that my employer approved count towards my 90-days of unemployment?**

**No!** Approved vacation time from a job/position, does not count as "unemployment" if you are still considered an employee.

### **7.) Do I need to pay taxes while on OPT?**

While on OPT, you are subject to all applicable federal, state and local taxes and must file a tax return. Although LIM does not endorse any specific tax-preparation organization; there are many companies that work specifically with international students who need to file taxes (each year, in the spring); Example: SprinTax

### **8.) What are my options after my OPT ends ?**

If you have maintained status while on OPT, you are allowed a 60-day grace period following your OPT expiration date (your EAD end date). You can depart the U.S., apply to change your status with the government, or transfer your F-1 status to a new school or program. In some cases, you may want to pursue these options before the end of your OPT.



### **9.) My degree was a STEM designated degree, can I apply for the STEM extension?**

If you have maintained status while on OPT, you are allowed to apply for the 24-month STEM extension. You must file this application, with the government, **before the end of your OPT period**. You may file your STEM extension, with the government, up to 90 days before the end of your OPT period (but cannot file after). The process for STEM extension approval is similar to the OPT process, in that you must start with the LIM College application. Email [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu), for details and guides related to the STEM extension.

### **10.) H1-B**

LIM College International Student Services staff is not able to provide you with legal advice about H1-B sponsorship. Students who are interested to find out more about applying for H1-B should consult with an experienced immigration attorney. Additionally, you may wish to review information on the following websites:

- <https://www.uscis.gov/eir/visa-guide/h-1b-specialty-occupation/h-1b-visa>
- <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2014/04/f-1-students-learn-about-h-1b-status>

LIM College cannot provide legal advice on immigration matters not related to your F-1 status and we cannot endorse any immigration attorney's or websites to help you obtain another status such as H1-B.

## **QUESTIONS?**

**EMAIL: [ISS@limcollege.edu](mailto:ISS@limcollege.edu)**